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SUBJECT: FRELIMO CONGRESS STRENGTHENS GUEBUZA'S MANDATE,
SHOWS MORE DOMINANT PARTY

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Reftel: 06 Maputo 1306

Sensitive But Unclassified - Handle Accordingly

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Mozambique's ruling FRELIMO Party held its 9th Party Congress from November 10-14 in Quelimane, the capital of Zambezia Province. The congress was characterized by a number of 'firsts:' the first congress held outside of Maputo since independence, the first congress to be open to all segments of the population (including the media and even a few members of the opposition), and the first congress to overtly address the growing HIV/AIDS problem. The elections to leadership positions included significant numbers of youth and women and achieved a symbolic balance between supporters of former President Joaquim Chissano and President Guebuza. Nevertheless, the congress strengthened Guebuza's role within the party and showcased FRELIMO's increasing dominance of political activity. End Summary.

//BACKGROUND//

¶2. (U) FRELIMO held its 9th Party Congress from November 10-14 in Quelimane, the first time since independence that its congress had been held outside Maputo. The choice of Quelimane is also politically significant, since Zambezia generally is regarded as a RENAMO stronghold. The move is seen as an attempt to portray FRELIMO as a more universal party that is able to hold its congress anywhere in the country. As noted in reftel, the 9th Party Congress was moved up a year to 2006, ostensibly to provide additional time for FRELIMO to prepare for the 2009 general elections, but also to plainly demonstrate to citizens the national importance of the party and to consolidate Guebuza's power base. In the months leading up to the congress, senior party officials were involved in all stages of preparations, including the recertifying of party rolls, touring provinces to gain a sense of regional concerns, as well as logistical groundwork.

//CORRUPTION AND HIV/AIDS TAKE CENTER STAGE//

¶3. (U) Continuing one of his major campaign pledges, President Guebuza used the congress to address corruption, particularly the causes and the government's responsibility in managing corruption. Guebuza lamented the lack of accountability, weak supervision mechanisms, the failure to apply laws, and the practice of nepotism and favoritism. In addition, he promised to promote greater government transparency, which he noted would contribute to more

professionalism and ultimately an environment more favorable to investment and economic growth.

¶4. (U) President Guebuza, Prime Minister Luisa Diogo, former President Joaquim Chissano, and Graca Machel, the widow of the first Mozambican President, Samora Michel, each used the forum as an opportunity to speak frankly about the increasingly critical HIV/AIDS situation. In his opening speech, President Guebuza stated that the numbers of infected Mozambicans had "reached levels of calamity" and that "HIV/AIDS is becoming a serious obstacle to our efforts to fight against poverty." Diogo announced that all 128 districts would have anti-retroviral treatment available for all those eligible by the first quarter of 2007.

//SELECTING THE LEADERSHIP//

¶5. (SBU) Delegates reelected Guebuza as President of FRELIMO while electing Chissano as honorary President in a move that many press reports characterized as an attempt to unite the two main factions of the party. Chissano promised "not to interfere" with Guebuza, which may have been a tacit admission that he has done so in the past. Delegates also elected 60 of the 160 members of the Central Committee, FRELIMO's larger decision making body. Of note, three of the five candidates receiving the most votes were women, including Prime Minister Diogo, former first lady Machel, and deputy chairperson of the Assembly, Veronica Macamo. It is also significant that several younger members were elected, including Samora Machel Junior, son of the country's first president, and Nyeleti Mondlane, daughter of the founder and first president of FRELIMO, Eduardo Mondlane.

¶6. (U) On the final day of the Congress, members of the Central Committee elected members to the Political Commission, the body makes the most important decisions

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affecting the party and the government. The new commission will have 17 members (it previously had 15). The reelected include Guebuza, Chissano, Diogo, Foreign Minister Alcinda Abreu, FRELIMO party whip Manuel Tome, Speaker of the Parliament Eduardo Mulembwe, Interior Minister Jose Pacheco, former Defense Minister Alberto Chipande, Maputo Mayor Eneas Comiche, FRELIMO deputy whip Margarida Talapa, and first Vice-President of the Parliament Veronica Macamo. New members include Planning Minister Aiuba Cuereneia, veteran of the independence struggle Raimundo Pachinuapa, Education Minister Aires Aly, former speaker of the Maputo Municipal Assembly Teodoro Waty, women's activist Paulina Mateus, and Conceita Sortane. The four members who lost their seats on the commission are former Veteran Affairs Minister Antonio Hama Thai, former Transportation Minister Tomaz Salomao, former Prime Minister Pascoal Mocumbi and Women and Social Affairs Minister Virgilia Matabele (COMMENT: Post will provide septel bio information on those members for whom we have not already submitted bios. END COMMENT).

¶7. (SBU) Despite early speculation that the new Secretary General of FRELIMO would be a strong, well-known figure, such as Graca Machel, Antonio Hama Thai, Feliciano Gundana, or Mariano Matsinhe, delegates chose current Nampula Governor Filipe Paunde (he was the sole candidate running for the job). The choice of Paunde, presumably by Guebuza, is somewhat unexpected, although according to some press reports, during his time as Secretary of Province, Paunde worked hard to increase FRELIMO membership in the traditionally RENAMO province. Other analysts opine that Guebuza did not want a potential rival in the high-profile position.

//COMMENT//

¶8. (SBU) The reconfirmation of President Guebuza as President of FRELIMO may be seen as a renewal and

reinforcement of his mandate and his attempts to project a more positive and inclusive image of FRELIMO. The party has enticed many officials of other parties to defect over the last year, reportedly with promises of jobs or other benefits. Its role in directing the government has become steadily more prominent under Guebuza, and some opponents claim it is moving towards a renewed one-party state. The Congress featured a blurring of the line between party and government, with many government employees helping in preparations. The presence of opposition parties, including a "constructive opposition" group of parties not represented in the legislature that made a public donation to help FRELIMO pay for the Congress, was a sign that all recognize that FRELIMO is the only game in town.

19. (SBU) The appointment of Paunde as Secretary General may have a significant impact if President Guebuza decides to appoint an incumbent government minister or provincial governor to take Paunde's place as Governor of Nampula. This would provide sufficient pretext for a government reshuffle, particularly since Guebuza has been openly critical of the performance of some of his ministers. END COMMENT

Dudley